{ See Note at end. }

UNITY

CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT,

FOR

FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

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EARTHLY IMMORTALITY.

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WISDOM OF SOLOMON, IV, 1, 2: Better is it to have . . . . . virtue, for the memory thereof is immortal; because it is approved with God and with man. When it is present men take example at it; and when it is gone they desire it; it weareth a crown and triumpheth forever, having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled reward.

As summer comes round once more, the world-old parable voices itself again in the world-old prophecy of the heart of man that even thus, at length, shall "every winter turn to spring." For one, I believe that the great hope of life beyond the grave is no mockery. I see nothing in our most modern knowledge to weaken its intrinsic trustworthiness. Its real grounds remain undisturbed, undisturbable, deep in the constitution of the order amid which we live.

Our present period seems to me one of those epochs wherein an old system is slowly breaking up, only to introduce a higher system, in which the ancient lights, ordained to rule by night, will reappear in the new heavens over the new earth. There will be needed but a change of electric conditions, such as again and again our world has experienced, to bring out from the clouds, fresh and fair as ever, the worlds beyond; and our children may wonder why we should have sadly questioned where they see clearly and rejoice. None the less it is hard for us, through the atmosphere of our age of transition, to see the light and to feel the warmth of those spiritual realities in whose calm glory our fathers walked serene, beneath whose heavenly guidance our children may lay a steady course to "the haven where they would be." For us, born into an age which "blots out life with question-marks," there is no escape, wholly, from the clouds that hang low over the valley of the shadow of death. We must, perforce, face the dread mystery with somewhat of misgiving. Not the stoutest-hearted believer can avoid the infection of an air into which doubt is being daily ejected from myriads of smoky flues. With this breathing of an air that poisons the centers of faith, we all feel, at times, the drying up of the springs of moral energy. Strength for strenuous aspiration and steadfast loyalty and doughty battling with temptation has too long flowed in upon our souls through this high hope, for us not to have a sense of ethical enervation when its waters of life run low and sluggish. In such hours we need to feel the quickening of some other hope, that does not, cannot slip from our grasp. A strong swimmer who has buoyantly played among the breakers, feeling no need of any help other than that which lies coiled in the knotted muscles of his stalwart frame, may find himself, in the fearful suck of the undertow, swept from

his footing, and may feel that he is being borne swiftly out to sea. Then he will need to clutch at any help of rope that may be at hand, to stay himself until he recovers his footing and is safe again. In the "tidal moments of devoutest awe," when faith is flooding towards eternal life, it is easy to be bravely good. When the ebb sets in, and the wash of the waters sucks the ground from beneath our feet, until we feel no hold of anything solid, and seem to be being borne resistlessly out into the dark depths of doubt—then the wise man will grasp at any hand out-reached to steady him, until the next tide makes inward towards belief. Such a rope I would throw out to some soul here, who may be struggling in the waters where I have struggled.

The words of the text form the expression, in ancient Israel, of a motive to noble life which has indeed always told upon earnest men mightily, but which has told with new force in our day. We have seen this thought gather a solidity and take on a glory unknown to it of old. The undying action among men of a virtuous life has become the core of a new belief. In the faith of an immortality of influence upon this earth, many of our best men find a new inspiration to noble life. The greatest genius of womankind whom our century has seen, breathed her heroic soul away in the strength of no other hope and faith than of such an earthly immortality—her heaven an abiding still upon the earth,as a force of truth and goodness,in the words which she had written and the influences which she had pulsed forth from her rich personality. A hope which fed such a soul with juiciness must have succulence. I cannot receive this expectation as a substitute for our "larger hope;" but I am thankful for it as a supplement—the other hemisphere of the truth which rules our night, now brought out into the light. As such, let us look at it to-day.

Death does not end all for us, even here upon the earth. True, it seems of most men that, when their bodies are borne away out of sight, *they* themselves disappear from among us. In a few afterthrills of memory, a few faint echoes of their words and deeds, they appear to haunt the earth awhile; but the ghostly presences ere long pale, till the places that knew them know them no more. Whether this be really so we can best judge from the stronger lives, the more positive forces of humanity, in whom the common truth is emphasized.

That the strong souls do not die upon the earth is plain to any one. By every test and sign they live on after death.

(1.) Is action a sign of life? Then do the dead live. Upon more than one soul here to-day the mastering touch is lightly laid from hands now crossed above the breast. A sainted mother, a noble father, a mated soul torn from the side, a child whom men call dead—walk before us, leading us by the hand. Our best influences flow from them. Our highest aspirations they waken in us. When we pray they are whispering within us. The real leaders of mankind are the men who are buried. Who are inspiring the dullards, emancipating the oppressed, enriching the poor of earth, blessing men with every good gift, like unto those whom we think lie passive in their graves? In the van of progress march the ghosts. The rulers of men are not found in palaces but in tombs. The kings of the earth are not *on* it but *in* it. The Czar who sits today on the throne of Russia is not half so truly the ruler of that Empire as the dead Peter, whose ideas still shape the policy of the government, whose personal influence is still throbbing in its ambitions. Back of the French President looms the power behind the throne—the dead Napoleon, whose spirit, alas! still dominates the national mind, firing it with the love of glory. A few years ago the greatest living soldier in our land, endeared to the people's heart by his rescue of the Union from destruction, and by many a noble personal trait, matched himself against another soldier president, whom we say sleeps by the waters of the Potomac—and the living Grant proved weaker than the dead Washington.

An imposing hierarchy of priestly lords, leading up to the Grand Llama himself, appears to rule the consciences of the hundreds of millions of men in the East, who follow the direction of the greatest religious system in the world; but the real mas-

ter of those myriads continues to be the wandering beggar-teacher whom Amana and his fellow-disciples laid away in the last sleep, twenty-four centuries ago; whose ashes we could not by searching find—lost in the common dust of India; whose spirit fires the souls of all who seek the life of the Buddha.

(2) Is the power of growing a body, of appropriating and assimilating foreign matter, and out of it, as the old housing fails, building a new structure for itself, which shall preserve the ground plan of the being—is this a sign of life? Then none are so alive as the dead.

An institution is the true body of a man, in which, whether in stately codes or splendid piles of marble or well-knit societies of men, genius houses itself, to live on still and work.

John Wesley's body lies not in England, turning into dust; it walks our earth in the noble structure of Methodism, instinct still with his fervid enthusiasms, vital with his exhaustless spiritual energy. Spirits materialize more truly than in the shabby borrowings of flesh from slumbering mediums, for a momentary appearance in questionable back rooms. The dead seize us and inhabit us.

The nineteenth century rendering of Paul's personification of Charity, who left his dust not long ago in the old Abbey which he loved so fondly, shrined within his soul another soul; and his body might almost have been as truly claimed by the Dr. Arnold who lived in every ideal, and stirred in every aspiration of the man, the clergyman and the Englishman.

A young Jew had been reverently lifted down from a gallows-cross near Jerusalem a generation before; yet to the consciousness of Saul of Tarsus, He had risen from the dead and taken up his abode within himself, so that Paul could truly say: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

(3.) As the crowning power of being, we say that life can reproduce itself. Then are the dead alive. Who beget sons and daughters like the ghosts? Whose progeny so numerous as the offspring of those who lie within their graves? How many artists has the dead Raphael stirred into life? How shall we number the intellects which Shakespeare has quickened? What are the generations of Plato? Who will call the roll of the spiritual offspring of Moses and Paul? When will cease growing the multitudinous family in whom Jesus Christ is ever being born again? There is no fertility like that of spirit. Theodore Parker, as he lay dying in Florence, said: "You may bury me here, but the true Theodore Parker is in Boston, and he will live and grow there." Every vital life seeds down itself upon the earth, and goes on bearing fruit after its kind while the seasons roll around, coming to life in each new generation.

Dead! You and I may be really less alive than those over whom has been said: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust"—the priests forgetting then to add: "*Spirit to spirit.*" The touch of death which seems to resolve men into *things* is really, in many instances, the touch which liberates them into free spirits, superior to space and time, at home on every soil, young with each new generation. The grave proves the cradle of an earthly immortality. Thenceforth they are pure energy, vital force of mind and soul, charging the very air of earth. The choicest fruits mellow after they are gathered.

We might wander on some bright June day out from Athens, through fields in which the wheat was being reaped, over meadows gay with flowers, till we came to an old olive grove now blossoming amid its gray-green leaves; and then, sitting by the banks of the Chephissus, we might muse of the time when Plato walked and taught, surrounded by his admiring disciples. Here he closed his talks one day and never again came forth to meet his pupils, and the world was left without its master of philosophy. Nay, rather, then he was born anew, and, becoming the genius of ideal philosophy, left Athens to take up his abode and resume his work wherever men look up to the things unseen, to the patterns showed them on the mount; drawing his pupils from Italy and Germany and France and England, into a true university, where "the nations" gather. In our summers, he comes again to our own Concord and

meets, amid its groves, with his nineteenth-century disciples; the unseen, impalpable presence of the dead Grecian, and not any flesh and blood American, being the living master of the school.

When was Jesus born into the Christ who guides and rules the hearts of Christendom, if not when upon the cross he cried: "Father into thy hands I commend my *spirit;*" and his living spirit went forth upon the four winds of heaven, to breathe the atmosphere of the new heavens over the new earth.

Ah! but you say, all this is only the influence of men who *were* once but are not now upon the earth; the effect following these mighty causes; the widening ripples from the great stones cast into the sea, which have none the less gone down in it forever because, long after they disappeared, the stir they roused came rippling up upon the sandy shore.

Have you then not learned enough concerning force to know that the motion *is* the force passing over into the water; is the force itself? Men are forces, conscious forces; and, in the motion they impart to minds and hearts, they themselves live on and on in ever widening reach of an influence, which is in truth their own most real *inflowings.*

This "I" so dear to most of us, this "thou" so dear to some of us, what are they? Outward visibilities and tangibilities of matter—phosphorous and lime and iron and water—standing in relief against the sunlight, resisting all attempts to occupy their spaces? Then are we mortal indeed, dying out every seven years. Then our dead *are* in their graves.

"*Why seek we the living among the dead?*" *They* are not there; they are risen. They never were those earths and minerals which we laid in kindred elements. They were spirit-forces, mind and conscience and will, energies of thought and aspiration and purpose. Wherever these forces continue to work, *they* are and will be still; in us, in our fellows, in the children who will come after us, on unto the uttermost bounds of humanity. Was the querulous, miserly, soured old man whom we might have found hiding away in his wretched garret at Chelsea, Turner; or is that the true Turner who stirs us from the walls of the National Gallery, making us live more fully in his presence? That roystering youth, tumbling into all sorts of scrapes in the villages of Leicestershire; that loose actor and playwright of the Globe, the boon companion of the gay wits of London; that comfortable and respectable citizen of Stratford-on-Avon, dining and driving and sleeping, till at length he was laid away in the village church—was that Shakespeare? Was not that the real Shakespeare who entered into Othello, and Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest, and still lives on among us, immortal on the earth? No vault shuts him in. Death never expatriated him from earth. He is bodied in his books.

It was my privilege, a few years ago, to join in a worship never by me to be forgotten. An Easter in Westminster Abbey is the poetry of religion. Into that venerable nave the bodies of England's most illustrious sons had been borne through ten centuries, amid the sobs of assembled multitudes. On the steps leading up to the choir, by which I stood, had rested the forms of kings and queens, of soldiers, statesmen, poets and painters, on the way to their last resting places. Around me, on every hand, were the mortal remains of heroes, saints and sages, of whom, from earliest childhood, I had read. Crowned heads, whose valorous deeds had thrilled my youthful blood, slept quietly in the chapels by my side. Behind me, in the poet's corner, were the remains of singers whose strains had enkindled my maturer years. A mighty throng crowded every inch of standing room, as other throngs had done through thirty generations, when monarchs were crowned or buried, when great preachers thundered or solemn Te Deums were sung. The westering sun stole dimly through the rich, mazy windows, over the assembled host, while the great-souled little Dean—now alas! one more sacred memory in the place of his Catholic ministrations—preached from the words "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Over against him as he spoke, on the tablet of the renowned Handel, stood, graven by the maestro's last request, these same words; and, as the Dean concluded, a bird-like voice caught up the immortal

setting of the words, warbling through the stilled air, rippling round the mighty columns, filling the building with this lofty strain of hope, until it seemed to me that each one of the illustrious dead around was whispering back from beyond —"though, as for my skin, worms destroy this body, yet out of my flesh shall I see God." Then, exultant, victorious, as the song of the host no man can number, surging like the sound of many waters round the throne of the Lord and Giver of Life, rose the "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

And I went forth into the civilization which this army of the dead had patiently builded, through many generations; into the London of splendid palaces and glorious churches and noble philanthropies; the England of political freedom and constitutional government, of martial valor and naval heroism, of literary culture and poetical genius, of scientific knowledge and social justice, of moral principle and religious faith; the city and the state which were feeling still their vital power, their unspent force, and which were following still their splendid leadership—and I knew that the great dead slept not in the Nation's Mausoleum, waiting for the Archangel's trump, but that in the living civilization they live on, immortally alive.

This is all very fine, you say, as a prospect for those who are greatly gifted, a gospel for the geniuses of earth. What expectation of such earthly immortality is there for us, who will win a scant paragraph in the papers, a "poor fellow" from some scores of friends, and then only a dull ache in a few loving hearts to keep us from oblivion? Well, friends, if there be no earthly immortality save for those who make themselves imperishable, sounds there in this fact no trumpet-call to live so that men can not forget you? If the immortality of genius be beyond your reach, the immortality of usefulness is within your grasp. There are those already whom the world will not let die, who never knew the thrill of genius, but who knew right well the throb of human love that drew them to the service of their fellows, in which they developed a forcefulness that death can not dissipate, that time shall not exhaust. Paul was a genius, but Peter was only a true hearted fisherman, whose strength was in his soul. Who lowlier than the Glasgow cobbler, who has bodied himself in the vast institution of the Sunday-school? Elizabeth Fry wrote neither philosophies nor poems, but her simple, faithful doing of a work for humanity, which she saw waiting to be done, has immortalized her. No high intellect had the man whom Italy still mourns, after three years' loss, while all the western world does him homage. His brain only led him into follies, which made men long that death might come and bury the errors that were sure to prove mortal. His heart made him. The generous ardour of unselfish patriotism which devoted him to his people; the glorious magnanimity which, at the head of his victorious army, the idol of a nation, laid a Kingdom at the feet of a petty prince, while he sought his island home with a few dollars in his pocket and a red shirt on his back; this splendid heroism of a simple soul, which made, out of petty fragments, *Italy*—immortalizes on our earth a Garibaldi. Have within you such a strong and simple soul, bent on noble deeds, and the work will come in which you too shall live on, an imperishable force upon the earth. You may thus be counted among the immortals, *if you will.* Mr. Landis is no genius, nor any saint, I fancy, but a wide-awake American, who, while building his own fortune, wished to help his fellows to a happier, better state; and so today, amid the sands of southern New Jersey, a model town has risen at his touch, as if by magic; where ten thousand people, who else would have pined in over-crowded centers, exposed to the temptations that infest our cities, have found comfortable homes wherein their children grow in health and virtue, tempted by no grog shops on the corners and by no houses opening downward into hell. Thus this business man has won his immortality.

Your papers of canonization are in your own hands. Fill them out with noble lives, and humanity will sign them, and God himself will seal them.

But even the feebly forceful do not die. No true and worthy life fades out upon the earth. No force of soul vanishes,

Force is never lost. It can but change its form. To the precise measure of its energy, each life will last. Every life of sweet-souled, sunny goodness, of patient, earnest service, of honest, faithful toil for truth, counts for its full weight in the momentum of humanity's progress. It does not go out; it goes *in* upon the race. You may not be able to detect its presence and admeasure its activity, but this you cannot do with forces most indubitably at work in nature. Each smallest star shimmers with light and vibrates with heat that tell to their full force upon our earth, though no finest test can distinguish their action. The little leaf drops from the stem; but behind it, in the veins, the sap flows somewhat faster, fresher, fuller, for that dead leaflet's life. That leaf lives on, in the great organism into which its energy has passed. Humanity thus feels each vital individuality of the past, now taken up within the organic life of man.

Our age has learned to speak of society as an organism, not in poetic metaphor but in solid truth of science. Mr. Spencer shows us how every test of a real organism holds good of civilization. Civilization is a living body, in which successive generations are as the septennial changes of our bodies; each individual cell being vitalized from the common life, and in turn feeding that large life from its tiny being; charging the blood with its special qualities, and bequeathing to the organism its vitality, as liberated energy. Everything which is imperishable in its structure is the deposit of these individual cells. All the vitality of its blood is the conservation of these infinitesimal forces. Man, "writ large," does not steal the capital "M," and fraudulently smuggle on a personification. He is a real Being, whose years are centuries. Men live and die—Man lives on forever. Men who live so as to lend some tiniest tissues to this growing structure of laws and institutions and knowledges, or so as to charge this enriching blood of ideals and aspirations, of faiths and hopes and loves, with some faintest force of goodness,—live on in this deathless Being. There are islands in the Southern Seas whose beautiful bloom of tropical vegetation grows upon the coral mountains which uncounted generations of tiny creatures have lived and died to rear. Such a formation is civilization. Thus it is that our social organism has come to have the noble form and life which we see and feel to-day.

The vast body into which are organized governments, industries, trades, sciences and arts, has been slowly builded up by the patient toil of successive generations; by the faithful labor of myriads of nameless men and women, whose coralline legacies, accumulating, have made this splendid structure. Its rich life-blood of sentiments, beliefs and principles has taken on its ruddy red, as of the blood which Dante saw pulsing in the form of Charity in the upper heaven, from the strenuous aspiration, the brave battling with evil of multitudes of earnest souls, seeking each its highest and best, and thus teaching the vital currents a gentler rhythm, a finer flow. Every thing in which we rejoice to-day, as constituting Christian civilization, is the work of men and women in the past, into which they put their lives; and in which, blessing us still, they live on among us, in glorified bodies of laws and letters, in sublimed energies of hopes and faiths. That the nerves of the pre-historic man might be made capable of thrilling with the fine motions of spiritual worship, and you and I be dowered with the aspirations of to-day, hosts of men and women have striven wearily in heavy duties and battled bravely with besetting sins, agitated with

> "The shudder of restraining awe,
> The slow-wept tears of contrite memory,
> Faith's prayerful labor."

The souls of the dead have passed into conscience, and its voice is majestic with the echoes of generations of brave and faithful lives. Thus, too, in the growing life of man, on into generations yet unborn, you and I may live, our little individualities merged in the large being of the race, whose conditions we have helped to better, whose vital force we have made more rich and noble. Thus our lives must make themselves felt, through the future of humanity, to the exact measure of their forcefulness.

I recall how, as a boy, I mingled in the

huge throng which crowded into the old National Hall in Philadelphia, at noon of the second of December, 1859, to company the soul of a brave, erratic man into the valley of the shadow of death. Down in Virginia, at that hour, strong lines of soldiers were guarding a rude wagon, in which, seated upon his coffin, this old man rode to meet his doom, fearless and calm; while, in the hall whither my boyish heart had drawn me, the great crowd surged and seethed in tumultuous indignation, and while a nation waited in suspense. Heeding not the sullen faces that scowled upon him, his eyes lingering on the lovely mountains and seeming to catch, beyond their brows, the light of a land not very far off, beautiful, blessed; sad only in the thought that he had failed to break every yoke from the slaves around him and to let the oppressed go free, he came at last to the scaffold that was waiting for him. On its steps he paused to lift tenderly from its mothers' arms a black baby, and to kiss it gently, while a tear fell in baptism on its brow. And then his soul passed from out its weary body, and the hushed throng, three hundred miles away, drew a long breath as the hour struck, and whispered—"he is dead!" Dead? He had but begun to live, and work his lofty aim of a people's freedom! His errors were covered in the grave that opened for him under the shadow of our Adirondacks, while all that was pure manly in his heroic soul went forth into Northern Manhood, opening dull consciences, firing apathetic hearts, rousing sluggish wills, till a Nation rose in the wrath his wraith enkindled. Then, through the dark days in which our homes poured out their bravest and their best, while the long line moved on to save the Union—as feeling the presence and the power of a spirit that seemed to lead them on to another task beyond—our soldiers sang:

"John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the dust,
But his soul goes marching on."

"O, may I join the choir, invisible,
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence—live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues? So to live is heaven;
To make undying music in the world,
Breathing as beauteous order that controls,
With growing sway, the growing life of man.

* * * * * * *

This is life to come,
Which martyred men have made more glorious
For us who strive to follow.

May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And, in diffusion, ever more intense?
So shall I join the choir invisible,
Whose music is the gladness of the world."

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Our "Church-Door Pulpit" hints its purpose in its name. It aims to furnish fortnightly a transfigured tract,—transfigured by being paid for, and by representing not so much a given system of beliefs as the emphasis, in somewhat varying beliefs, on "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion;" this tract to be taken from the rack or table at the church-door to the home, there to serve its little mission by reading in the family, lending to a neighbor, mailing to a distant friend, etc. We hope the plan may be destined to wide adoption by Liberal churches as part of their regular church-work.

The word "UNITY" in the title bears to the Committee who arrange the series a wide meaning, pointing more to the substance, than to the forms, of religious thought and faith; and in inviting contributions they have sought, not only through the whole range, but in both directions beyond the range, of those who bear the "Unitarian" name,—though most of the writers must naturally be found within that name. "New Orthodoxy," "New Judaism," those who care for no name but "Religion," and the "Ethical Societies," will all be represented. The choice of subject is left to the writers; and *each writer is responsible for his own utterance alone, and for nothing else in the series.* "One of your best—a life-helping sermon, or a thought-sermon reaching the life," was the invitation sent out.